

Sentimental Journey

The 146th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron:
One generation of America's military taking
care of another.

Master Sergeant Michael Foster and Major James Coen, of the 146th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, strap in a female passenger aboard a Hercules C-130E prior to takeoff for the flight to her new home at the Veterans' Center in Yountville.



**By Master Sergeant Michael Drake
146th Airlift Wing**

They normally care for the sick and injured, transporting them from battlefield to distant hospitals. But on this day, members of the 146th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, of the California Air National Guard from Channel Islands Air National Guard Station, would transport 11 World War II-era veterans from the Barstow Veterans Home in the inland desert of Southern California to their new residence at the Yountville Veterans Home in the lush, rolling hills of Napa County. The crew, consisting of four members of the 115th Airlift Squadron and eight members of the 146th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, flew to Barstow-Daggett Airport where they picked up the 11 patients and six VA attendants. The flight aboard a Hercules C-130E from Barstow to Napa took less than ninety minutes, versus the twelve

quick, and none of it was required. At Napa, a huge contingent from the Yountville Veterans Home was already gathered to greet the vets, help them from the aircraft, and welcome them to their new home.

There was initial concern how some of the veterans – especially those who had been transported aboard in wheelchairs – would fare on the flight. However, with the advance planning by the air evac crew, and the care and attention rendered by squadron members, along with VA attendants, the concern proved to be unfounded. Some vets even seemed eager for their plane ride to Napa, demonstrated their excitement during the flight, and expressed their appreciation afterwards.

For Bill Gibson and his wife, Helen, the air evac



146th AES Medical personnel and the flight crew pose with a VA attendant and two World War II-era veterans they transported from Barstow to Napa.

hours it would have required by land. The Air Guard transport was requested by the California Department of Veterans Affairs in order to reduce the travel time and discomfort for the patients and was coordinated with the California VA, Global Patient Movement Requirement Center at Scott Air Force Base, Major General Dan Gibson – Commander of the California Air Guard, and the 146th Airlift Wing.

At Barstow-Daggett Airport, members of the air evac team helped the veterans from the bus, and up the ramp into the C-130. Pillows were placed on the seat-backs to make the canvas troop seats a bit more comfortable. Prior to the flight, squadron members arrayed a full complement of medical equipment, in preparation for any medical contingency. However, the flight was smooth and



Members of the 146th AES and the 115th Airlift Squadron await veterans deplaning at the Napa Airport.

mission had special significance. The couple met during World War II and married after only 26 days of courtship. Helen was a nurse involved with patient movement and had volunteered to transport servicemen from the European theatre back to the states. She never got the assignment.

"This flight, today, with you guys — the Air Guard — is her first air evac mission," said Bill smiling. "It means so much to her and to us both. Thank you."

The impact of one generation of America's military caring for another — one that had served over half a century ago in a global conflict — was not lost on any of the crew members. As one said, referring to one of the vets wearing a Pearl Harbor cap as he disembarked from the plane and boarded the bus for his new home, "It puts a lump in your throat." 🐾

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